

## Spotlight on our Funders!

*In each edition, we invite one of our amazing funders/supporters to tell us more about their organisation, how they came to be involved with Open Road and how they help us fund our vital services.*

### **In this edition, Jo Macaulay, tells all**

Hello, I am Jo Macaulay and I am Head of Communications at Essex Community Foundation (ECF). ECF is an independent charitable trust, established in 1996 by a local family with a passion for philanthropy. We provide vital funding to Essex voluntary and community organisations through donations from individuals, companies, charitable trusts and public agencies. We invest these so that year on year, we can award grants and make a real difference to local people's quality of life. For those interested in supporting their local community, we provide a simple approach to effective charitable giving, whatever your area of interest.

I joined ECF in January 2001 as an administrator and in that year, we awarded £457,000 in grants to 262 organisations. Last year, we awarded £4.8 million to 426 organisations and 89 individuals. We are also one of the largest community foundations in the UK among a network of 46. In 2001, we started managing the Chiron Trust. Diana Tinson, a Colchester resident, had set up the Trust but transferred it to us when overseeing the administration and financial requirements became difficult. We continued to work with Diana, awarding grants with her involvement until her death in 2012. The Trust, now in Diana's name, continues as her legacy to Essex, annually supporting many charities tackling issues that she was interested in, including Open Road.

We are always pleased to talk to people about our work, sharing stories about our fundholders and the many local voluntary and community organisations that we support. Our website is full of information and if you are interested to know more, do get in touch.

#### **How did you find out about Open Road?**

I first met Chief Executive, Sarah at Open Road in 1999 when I was working for Royal London Insurance in Colchester. Royal London had recently set up a charitable fund with ECF to support charities in Colchester District and our grant to Open Road supported their complementary



Jo visiting us in the '90s

therapy service. I was invited to visit their Colchester Centre to learn more about their work and how they used alternative therapies to help clients. Recently, I found a photograph of me taken on that visit with their Acupuncturist and Chinese Herbalist, who explained ear acupuncture was proving an effective treatment. Just to be clear, I am on the left and I am sure you will agree that I haven't changed a bit, except for the glasses which I need to see anything under a font size 8!

#### **Which projects have you been involved in/ helped us to fund?**

We currently manage 167 charitable funds on behalf of our fundholders. All the applications we receive are fully assessed by our grants team and we present details of applications to our fundholders that meet the criteria they have chosen for their fund.

We have supported Open Road with grants since 1999; in total, we have awarded them £213,000 to support a wide range of activities, including core running costs. The grants range from £500 awarded in 2001 from the High Sheriff's Fund to pay for first-aid training for volunteers, to £27,600 awarded in December 2020 from our Essex Coronavirus Response and Recovery Programme to improve digital systems and IT so that Open Road could continue their work during COVID19. Over past years, we have been pleased to give regular support from the High Sheriff's Fund to a partnership initiative run by Open Road, the 'SOS Bus' project. These specially adapted vehicles are in Colchester High Street and Chelmsford City Centre at weekends to provide a safe haven and medical support to people who need it. They are staffed primarily by trained volunteers, supported by healthcare professionals, including paramedic practitioners and doctors who respond to medical emergencies and treat minor injuries and illness. Open Road often invite the High Sheriff during their year of office to spend an evening on the bus to see first-hand the work that is carried out, which reduces ambulance calls and A&E admissions.

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Open Road has long recognised the importance of working in partnership with other organisations and agencies to support clients. Alcohol and drug abuse is often combined with other issues, including poor mental health, domestic abuse and homelessness. As part of their partnership with Probation Service (Essex CRC), Open Road offers mentoring to women across Essex who are leaving prison, usually HMP Peterborough. Volunteer mentors help the women reintegrate into society to ensure that they do not fall back into offending behaviour patterns. As part of this work, we were pleased to award a grant to enable 12 women identified by Open Road, to take part in a Firebreak Course, run by Essex County Fire and Rescue Service. The women worked alongside highly-trained fire-fighter mentors to learn operational fire-fighting skills; each exercise creates an environment to learn the importance of team-work, build communication skills, interaction abilities and respect for others.

**Did anything unexpected happen? (for example, something positive that came out of the project you funded that you didn't expect/ a friendship/ inspiration for something else?)**

Sometimes the impact of a grant is immediately obvious, such as where the money is used to buy a piece of equipment. Occasionally though, we receive feedback which shows how even a small amount of money can make a real difference to an individual's life and improve their future opportunities. This was evidenced when Open Road reported on the impact of the Firebreak course and sent us this lovely story about one of the attendees.

"Before CG attended the Firebreak Course she struggled with her mental health, confidence and self-esteem, but during the course she found herself acting as a positive role model and mother-figure to the other women. She was encouraging of others and motivated the rest of the team on days when they were struggling. She fully immersed herself in all activities and at the end of the week during the passing out parade in front of family and friends, CG stepped forward to thank the Firebreak Team. It was very emotional watching her talk on behalf of her peers and in front of so many people. Afterwards CG said she would never have imagined having the confidence to speak publicly before completing Firebreak.

"Since completing the course, CG's confidence has continued to grow and she has co-facilitated the Open Road women's group, offering support and advice to her peers. Her new-found confidence and self-belief has also led her to start volunteering for User Voice (a charity that employs ex-offenders and

**Congratulations on your 30th Birthday! Essex Community Foundation is pleased to have supported your amazing work during that time and we will continue to do so in the future. Thank you for all you do to help people who are struggling with addiction to build safer and happier lives.**

engages offenders currently on probation). CG says that the Firebreak course is the best thing she has ever done and the most proud she has felt of herself. She was watched during her passing out parade by her sons which has enabled her to show them that she can be a positive role model and a parent to be proud of."

**What impresses you most about Open Road?**

Open Road supports some of the most vulnerable people in our community and has grown to one of the largest charities in Essex. They have a strong management team supported by over 210 volunteers with bases in five major Essex towns and three Kent bases. As mentioned, they actively embrace the importance of partnership working. They have an excellent track record in grant management and reporting which, for a grant funder like us, is really important as we are often required to provide feedback to our donors on the impact of the money we award.

**What do you envisage is next for Open Road?**

Open Road has achieved so much in the past 30 years, particularly during the pandemic. The team has worked hard to keep their centres open and offered shift counselling so that they could continue giving face-to-face support. They are deeply committed to the people they serve and being a constant presence and having a strong local influence is at the heart of their work. Alongside this, they want to grow so that they can compete with big national funders and be less dependent on commissioned contracts. Open Road's experience in supporting vulnerable people and their families is second to none, I am sure they will build on the past 30 years of hard work and success to grow the organisation further. We look forward to being on that journey with them.

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